NBC NIGHTLY NEWS -CAMPAIGN 2000 REPORTS - SEPTEMBER 2000

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From SEPTEMBER 2000 NBC NIGHTLY NEWS reports from campaign 2000.

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president the current vice president al gore has according to one new national poll opened up a double-digit lead over Texas Governor George W Bush a Newsweek magazine poll out tonight shows Gore up ten points over Bush 49 to 39 percent and the Republican Party is out with a new TV ad to try to turn those numbers around by going negative here's NBC's David Gregory today in the face of fresh evidence that Al Gore is widening his lead over Governor Bush's Labor Day approaches the Republican Party goes on the offensive unveiling an ad the gore campaign labels a personal attack who's he gonna be today the Al Gore who raises campaign money at a Buddhist temple for the one who now promises campaign finance reform really most advisors say the ad which airs in 17 key states is designed to remind voters of what they don't like about the vice president specifically Bush says that Gore will say anything to get elected why I thought it was tongue-in-cheek this ad came up after about 30 million dollars of advertisement that [Music] today the vice-president in a conference call with reporters promises never to launch a personal attack and his running mate tells NBC News I'm afraid that it's a response to the fact that the bush-cheney ticket has been having some trouble lately but you know that's when our values are tested Sonny questioned the ads timing saying it makes bush appear defensive after two weeks of missteps aides admit over issues like taxes and prescription drugs for seniors nobody knows why they did it now why do you shoot your bullets in labor day that you Maine in Maine Eden middle of October Bush advisors maintained the ad was planned months ago and whether it's perceived as negative or not attacking Gore's character represents a major theme of the campaign when it's an issue of credibility Bush will do well but when it's detail after detail after detail Gord is better the question is

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detail Gord is better the question is will it work or will Labor Day the unofficial kickoff of the fall campaign marked just the start of this race getting personal David Gregory NBC News Washington Tuesdays from now control of Congress the Republicans have held a majority in both houses since 1994 but as NBC's John Palmer reports the Democrats are determined to take both back the battle for control of Congress began in earnest today as lawmakers went on the interview programs to market their arguments and predictions if indeed you're you believe what Al Gore is saying and you want the government to be aggressive in solving these educational health care problems there's only one way to assure these succeeds and that is a Democratic Congress I'm confident that we will maintain control for for Congress's in a row for the first time since the 20s the Republicans hold the Senate by 8 seats a comfortable margin there are 34 seats up for election this fall Democrats need to win five of the twenty now held by Republicans to regain control in the House a smaller challenge for the Democrats the Republicans hold just a 13 seat margin there with all 435 members of Congress up for election there are 34 open seats in which incumbents are not running 26 of those are currently held by Republicans if Democrats can hold their eight seats and pick up seven Republican seats they regain control I think we're gonna win the house back because the numbers favorites and the issues environment the fact of the matter is the American people support the Democratic caucus

issues prescription drugs for seniors a patient's Bill of Rights education for our future there is a huge permanency to the coalition's that we have created and getting those last seven seats for the Democrats is like picking up yardage inside the ten yard line to be very very difficult for them given the math Congress will confront a number of key issues in the six weeks before adjournment issues like tax cuts how much and where should they be made a patient's Bill of Rights a Medicare

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patient's Bill of Rights a Medicare prescription drug benefit gun control legislation money for teachers and school construction this week President Clinton will host Democratic congressional leaders at a rose garden ceremony to push the party's legislative agenda Republicans plan a similar rally here at the Capitol both parties know the stakes are high how they deal with those key issues between now and Election Day may well determine which party will control the next Congress John Palmer NBC News Washington good evening everyone Labor Day 2000 a day set aside to honor working Americans and a day of hard work on the presidential campaign trail Al Gore and George Bush and their running mates were barn storming through battleground states today with the question of debate still hanging over their heads but governor Bush may have stepped on his message of restoring honor and dignity to the White House today when a microphone caught him making an undignified remark about a newspaper reporter NBC's David Gregory is with the Bush campaign in Michigan tonight and Claire Shipman is with the gore campaign in Kentucky David let's begin with you well John collectively these battleground states are rich in electoral votes so with Governor Bush either even with or trailing the vice president in the polls the plan right now is to reach those crucial independent swing voters who will decide this fall's election on this stuff in Naperville Illinois Bush sharpens his attacks on the vice president says it's time for a leader with quote good common sense it's time to get rid of all those words like no controlling legal authority today Bush also uses the issue of the presidential debates to challenge Gore's credibility Bush has now agreed to primetime debates on NBC's Meet the Press with Tim Russert and CNN's Larry King Live Plus one of the three faceoff sponsored by the nonpartisan debate Commission Bush questions why Gore who promised to debate him anytime anywhere is balking when we tell you something we mean it

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when we tell you something we mean it when we say we're gonna do something we're gonna do what we say indeed Gore did challenge Bush to accept the Meet the Press debate back in July I've accepted for two or three months now your invitation to debate on this program have you gotten a yes from Governor Bush yet the gore campaign now says it will agree to any and all debates only after Bush commits to all three sponsored by the Commission the reason course advisors say the Commission debates aired on all the major networks to deliver the largest audience but NBC News would offer the Meet the Press debate to the other networks as well the Commission debates which started in 1988 feature a standard format that governor Bush has criticized as more theatrical than substantive aides say he feels the debates he's agreed to are better suited to him and will prove more informative than the cake also today an embarrassing moment for Bush in front of an open microphone just moments before telling a crowd of supporters it's time for quote plain-spoken Americans in the White House Bush uses an obscenity to describe a New York Times reporter he spots in the crowd boy who has promised to elevate the tone of discourse in Washington said later through a spokeswoman that he regrets his private remark to Dick Cheney was overheard by the media as for the reporter in question from the New York Times he said only he was disappointed by the governor's language John NBC's David Gregory thank you Vice President Gore didn't have anything direct to say about Governor Bush's caught on tape moment but he did make a veiled reference to it NBC's Claire Shipman has been on the gore campaign marathon for the past 24 hours and she joins us from Louisville Claire well John the Vice President has no great love for the press corps but today always eager to jab his opponent he praised the reporters traveling with him mainly for their stamina because for the last 24 hours Gore has been on a Labor Day marathon the last stop here in Louisville right over my shoulder for

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Louisville right over my shoulder for kicking off the fall campaign season with a whirlwind Labor Day all-nighter courting workers in four different states passing out coffee to the crowds sometimes punchy from too much caffeine and too little sleep Gore has the same message at every stop you're the ones who really need the help and that's what our focus ought to be on that's why I'm in this race I want to fight for you I'm for the people there for the powerful it's a team they think is paying off usually reluctant to talk about their extensive polling Gore advisors now brag about their most recent internal numbers which they say show a greatly changed terrain and a road to victory with Gore well ahead in the Northeast and California and Bush dominating the south and the West the battleground the nation's Center in Michigan and Wisconsin where Gore had been trailing his pollsters see him a few points ahead even in hotly contested Missouri and Ohio they give Gore a slight edge in Illinois in Pennsylvania he has a more substantial lead and the gore team says it will fight in the south for Louisiana and Arkansas where they're running even and Florida jeb Bush's governor but it's becoming test polls show where Gore once trailed significantly he's now ahead the Vice President made Tampa part of his Marathon swing today and aides say they are taking Florida so seriously that either he or his running mate Joe Lieberman will be there once a week until Election Day Moore also jumped into the political battle over debates today insisting despite an earlier pledge to go up against Bush on Meet the Press that his opponent is only trying to duck the formal matchups I'm happy to do the Meet the Press debate or Nightline debate or Sam and Cokie debate and all the others if we first put in place the Commission debates now Gore has always suggested he'd be happy to

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has always suggested he'd be happy to take on the Texas governor anytime anyplace now his aides say not at the expense of those Commission debates sources tell us though that the gore team might be willing to compromise on two out of three of those formal Commission debates and then add some additional debates Larry King Live Meet the Press but what they don't know here is whether the Texas governor is still negotiating John NBC's Claire Shipman Claire thank you a third presidential candidate hitting the campaign trail veteran consumer activist Ralph Nader campaigning today in Detroit this is his first all-out campaign for the presidency and even though he knows his chances of winning are very slim that isn't stopping him NBC's David bloom on the Nader campaign Ralph Nader at Ohio State University yes he was a cultural icon win their parents were the flower children with the tie-dyed shirts now a new generation of Nader's Raiders is singing the praises of the Green Party's presidential candidate this longtime consumer advocate is running a seat-of-the-pants anti-trade anti-globalization presidential campaign which in states like California and Michigan could still threaten support for Al Gore you hear reporters say well since you can't win aren't you worried about taking votes from Al Gore and I say to them gee I stay up at night sleepless worrying about Nader who first came to prominence fighting for safer automobiles in the 1960s argues Democrats have had their chance why should a candidate wants to build a new progressive clean party worried about the lesser of two evils or Tweedledum Tweedledee Republican Democrats mean you might wind up putting george w bush in the White House and you're okay with that well I'm running to win you don't run to lose his model is Jesse Ventura in fact he's hired the Minnesota governor's admin promises to

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Minnesota governor's admin promises to special interest groups over ten billion dollars finding out the truth priceless and while his rivals fly by private jet he goes commercial while they're in a motorcade he's in a rental car Nader's young and enthusiastic supporters their sneakers and their pierced noses have made this counterculture presidential campaign nothing Al Gore can turn up his nose at despite fading poll numbers the core support behind aiders candidacy is making some liberal Democrats unhappy there's a political reality here which is that his candidacy could draw enough votes in certain key states from Al Gore to give the entire election to George W Bush Nader says that's not his problem I'm running to strengthen the democracy in this country and clean up dirty politics the two parties aren't running on that platform why are they entitled to any votes and when Gore picked a moderate Democrat to be his running mate it made Nader's task of courting the left that much easier he's also unsurprising support from Ross Perot's former backers in the Reform Party I think that the clear winner in this election of the independent voter the true independent

voters is Ralph Nader now even Nader usually so sober is getting caught up in all the enthusiasm spread door insisting that if he could just get into those presidential debates he might stand a chance David bloom NBC News Washington question could turn out to be a very small number the reason the electoral map according to the polls undecided voters in less than a dozen battleground states mostly in the industrial east and Midwest will be the tipping point for the who wins the White House in November we're gonna be following these sought after voters the undecided in a special series of reports until November 7th will begin tonight with NBC's Lisa Myers in the nine weeks left some voters matter more than others to the candidates and Scott

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than others to the candidates and Scott and Tori nygren matter more than most why they're undecided live in the battleground state of Illinois and are having more trouble than usual choosing a candidate this year I don't feel like either one of the candidates are very strong candidates I don't particularly like if they're either of their characters I think Gore's just a little bit more genuine I agree that he still has a lot of canned responses but I do think that he seems a little bit less arrogant than Bush also undecided Jim Davidson a New Jersey high school coach who says he'll decide after the debates as far as Bush is concerned he seems to have a little more of a leadership kind of quality to him isn't his personality I know Gore has been painted as a wooden kind of puppet I don't know if he can make the the deals that have to be made as of today pollsters and campaign strategists say three out of four voters about 76 million Americans have firmly made up their minds another 20 million support a candidate but could change their minds only a tiny fraction of voters about six million are considered truly undecided and even smaller slice of undecided voters living in 10 battleground states may well decide this election you're looking at three quarters of a million - 1 million voters who at this point in time are genuinely undecided and who will pivot this election one way or another that's right the two campaigns will spend hundreds of millions of dollars targeting about a million voters mostly independent and moderate plus those twenty million voters whose support for their candidate is soft example Bush begins his labor day kick off near Chicago because two-thirds of swing voters in Illinois lived there and he singles out families at each stop to help sell his big tax cut to swing voters I'm Brian and his family make thirty nine thousand a year combined under my plan you'll pay no federal income taxes war also targets areas with large numbers of undecided in Michigan he hits the top

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undecided in Michigan he hits the top issue for swing voters their health care bill of rights but many undecided like killing moody who solve or speak at full company today pride themselves on being a tough sell and quite frankly I'm gonna be making my decision on November 6 all of which points to the closest election in decades with a fraction of undecided voters possibly making the difference Lisa Myers NBC News Washington none of the presidential campaign trail where Al Gore who's been criticizing governor bush for not providing enough details today released his own budget plan and it is the size of a Manhattan phonebook focusing on policy details is one way the gore campaign is trying to court crucial swing voters the undecideds they live in less than a dozen states their votes will likely decide this election and will be focusing on them through election day tonight NBC's Claire Shipman in one of those battleground states Michigan with the vice president and his master plan Claire what would you have worse night well Gore put out essentially what's a 10 chapter economic manifesto it outlines how he'll pay for all of his campaign promises and he's hoping it will send a message of fiscal responsibility to the key voters Al Gore on his favorite subject today talking numbers and policy I'm releasing a new economic plan innit a message that the gore team hopes will get people to the polls especially that critical group of undecided voters who will likely determine this election no blank checks no deficit spending tax cuts for the middle class instead of a tax giveaway for those who need at least the plan outlines how Gore will pay for proposals to shore up Social Security and Medicare for example popular issues too undecided voters like Katy prusik a waitress in

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voters like Katy prusik a waitress in Cleveland Ohio her priorities a good social security plan a very good health what else is in Gore's proposal ten ambitious economic goals including creating 10 million new high-tech jobs closing the income gap between women and men something they think appeals to both female and male swing voters and eliminating the national debt by the year 2012 paying down the debt is appealing to John Coleman a cigar store manager in Cleveland who's voted Republican for the last 12 years but this year is undecided still he's skeptical I think that paying down the national debt has a beautiful thing I am and I also don't think that that anybody really wants to do it today Bush attacked Gore's proposal saying his numbers just don't add up my plan has been endorsed by these Nobel Prize winners and leading economists his plan has been endorsed by Bill Clinton now both campaigns are well aware that polls show that undecided voters whether they're low income or high-income tend to be fiscally conservative so look for a lot of fighting over the next few weeks weeks about which candidate best fits that bill Tom thank you very much NBC's ago the fidella Kratz were in despair and Republicans were gloating Texas Governor George W Bush had what appeared to be a healthy lead in the presidential race Al Gore was struggling to find his feet in the matchup now with the election two months away gore is surging Bush is struggling so much so that today the governor declared himself the underdog of course all of this could change again several times but we'll begin tonight with NBC's David Gregory with the Bush campaign in Ohio David well Tom today Governor Bush shrugs off the high anxiety within the Republican ranks saying it's typical of even some of his eye allies to quote be ready to jump out of the foxhole before the first shell is fired still Bush concedes

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shell is fired still Bush concedes tonight his campaign has faltered tonight fresh evidence of Bush's backs lawn the new Zogby Reuters poll taken since Labor Day shows the Texas governor trailing the vice president by six points in a four-way race other polls are closer but Bush says the message is clear but I've been the underdog when I first started and that nothing's changed about underdog status what's gone wrong the debate over debates for starters advisors say Bush's acceptance of only one Commission debate when Gore pushes for three has become a major distraction the decision to air this ad accusing Gore of ducking a faceoff has apparently backfired now that Governor Bush is accepted Gore says unacceptable so I'm believing it's the kind of political wrangling undecided voters hate perhaps that's why today Bush signals indeed the debate schedule is open for negotiation and he wants a large audience to see them Bush shades also announced some changes hoping to reach women a critical group of undecided voters Bush will add to his calendar more of the town hall meetings he staged during the primaries so he can interact with voters in a less scripted way and in Michigan a key battleground state Bush uses another weapon to sway independent voters : Powell Bush suggesting to a group of veterans the retired general would almost certainly have a spot in a bush cabinet what else do undecided voters need to hear I think that question isn't big enough for the job is he's smart enough does he know enough does he have the right kind of experience but tonight Bush insists he still has no illusions about how tight this race is going to be and surprising some of his own advisers which makes this admission that Gore has a natural advantage because he's been part of an administration that can point to peace and prosperity in the country some thanks very much NBC's David Gregory tonight one of the big reasons that Vice President Gore is doing better at this stage of the campaign women a critical vote in recent presidential elections especially women voters who

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elections especially women voters who were undecided in those key electoral states NBC's Lisa Myers keeping track of that for us tonight the story behind Al Gore's surge in the polls begins with voters like Lisa Forrester in California an independent she voted for Bill Clinton four years ago but like these women we brought together last month before the Democratic convention she was undecided and definitely not sold on al gore seems to come across to me as phony or silly or fakie but then Forrester says she watched the convention was struck by gore and his daughter and that's that big kiss for his wife today foresters solidly for Gore how I see him differently is that he seems much more personable and he seems much more human I mean he wouldn't be that close I think with his family if he were not a nice guy in fact three of the four previously undecided women now support gore even those who once worried he was too tainted by Clinton

which helps explain why Gore tied with Bush among women almost a month ago now leads 54% to 33% a surprising twenty one point lead there's a huge gender gap war leads by 21 among women Bush by 11 points among men this year Democrats seem to be from Venus while Republicans are from Mars and basically what we're talking about here is that the Democrats are taking the lead among issues that women care the most about especially independent women as a result for for the first time this year has a small lead among those crucial independent voters also key lower middle income Americans like Adriana Ramirez for 30 years no one has won the White House without carrying this group Ramirez voted for Clinton but remains undecided I think I just we need a change I think we just need in my opinion I I'm not really for gore I mean

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opinion I I'm not really for gore I mean when he comes on I don't really take the time to listen to him I'm already listening to Bush among key groups in battleground states pollsters say this race remains very close in fact they say many swing and undecided voters are torn say they want both continuity and change making them more unpredictable than ever Lisa Myers NBC News Washington NBC News in depth tonight decision 2004 session the Republican presidential candidate faced with slippage in the polls and concern among some top Republicans about the state of his campaign now is changing tactics he's also changing his stand on the debates we begin tonight's in-depth reporting with NBC's David Gregory who joins us now from the Bush campaign David well Tom convinced that Al Gore is not going to agree to their debate proposals the Bush campaign is prepared to go back to the drawing board tonight and negotiate both campaigns expect to meet with the presidential commission on debates early next week perhaps in the meantime however Bush is trying to retool his image a bit everybody the new George Bush today courting undecided voters in Pennsylvania less formal now clutching a coffee cup and chatting gone is the stock stub speech delivered from the stage Bush is now going one-on-one by design of course advisers responding to polls showing an erosion of support among undecided women especially the old Bush needs more interaction and better pictures of an order for his message to break through they've even floated a new slogan real plans for real people when today Bush begins to take some questions when you have a really tough decision well I take I listen starters to gather all information next week Bush will resurrect the town hall meetings aides think he used effectively during the primaries to reach independent voters an

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primaries to reach independent voters an effective strategy some say and lets undecided to know that George Bush is listening and that's what the American people are looking for tonight the gore campaign says there's no need to comment on the new George Bush adviser saying Bush's difficulties because themselves and while george w bush was revamping his campaign strategy al gore was lashing into his opponents proposal to put some of the nation's social security dollars into private investment fund and gore was talking about education the issue that tops almost every voters list of concerns just how would gore and bush fix America's public schools and B C's Lisa Myers tonight continues our in-depth reporting 7:00 a.m. Harrisburg Pennsylvania an anxious brown family since Keisha and Monique off to a new charter school having fled their failing public school nine miles away Shana and Weston Hawkins are back in their failing school where half the students essentially flunked state reading and math tests two families struggling with the consequences of bad public schools I don't want to see Harrisburg schools fail but in the meantime we won't be able to get our children's four or five years back if they fail and don't get it right both bush and gore would expand the federal government's role in education Gore's main solution money spread more throughout the system Bush would force schools to raise test scores or lose some federal funds we've got a demand accountability how do you know unless you measure how can you tell whether children are learning to read and write and add to subtract unless you test Bush proposes annual reading and math tests in grades 3 through 8 more money for schools that improve less for failure and 47 billion dollars in new spending over 10 years to help teachers correct and diagnose reading problems for after-school programs and if a bad school fails to improve after three years low-income families would

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three years low-income families would get a $1,500 voucher for use at any public or private school that appeals to the Browns who'd prefer a private school the voucher is a great thing for people who can't afford you know Christian schools or private schools the strength of george w bush's education proposal is that he reaches down to individual children however it's not clear that he gives them enough resources Al Gore sees vouchers take needed money from public schools his plan shut down bad schools after two years and reopened them with new teachers and principals and he proposes increasing spending by 50% 115 billion dollars over ten years to put fully qualified teachers in every classroom test all new teachers and give teachers the training and professional development they deserve and to pay for free preschool for all four-year-olds hire more teachers and decrease class size build and upgrade schools provide raises for teachers Jill and Patrick Hawkins say Gore's plan is best for their troubled schools funding for more teachers would definitely help I like his proposals because I feel like he wants to fix the system that's there most experts praise Gore for the size of the investment but accountability is a huge weakness of Al Gore's proposal he gives money but he doesn't hold those schools feet to the fire two candidates two very different approaches to what they agree is a crisis hoping for high marks from families Lisa Myers NBC News Harrisburg Pennsylvania as the first first lady ever to run for public office NBC's Andrea Mitchell has been following the action it is shaping up to be the most expensive race in history and pollsters say for most voters Hilary Clinton is the issue she's been campaigning for more than a

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she's been campaigning for more than a year raising 22 million dollars her opponent Rick Lazio a little-known Republican congressman whom she tries to portray as too right wing for moderate New Yorkers I've been looking at his voting record and you know I get whiplash I mean you know I'm knocking my head back and forth because he has you know votes on both sides of as many issues as he possibly can manage Maggio jumped in only four months ago when New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani far better news but percent with personal and medical problems dropped out unlike Giuliani Blasio has been running almost a stealth campaign few events fewer news conferences in a state where Al Gore and Joe Lieberman are expected to draw millions of Democrats to the polls Lazio is not running a traditional Republican campaign because that's not in his best interest you saw that during the Republican convention he was a very low profile he does not need to remind New Yorkers that he's a Republican what Lazio is doing is raising money 19 million dollars and counties from Republicans around the country who don't like mrs. Clinton or her husband my own record I have my own name I don't need to use somebody else's name the campaign ads on both sides have been ferocious Hillary Clinton you just can't trust her with Rick Lazio the more you know as nasty as this campaign has been both candidates have been very well protected from serious questioning that is until this week when they will face their first head-to-head debate despite her long experience in the national spotlight the first lady is already trying to lower expectations you know I've never debated before ever in my entire life in a contest that has been dead even for months Wednesday's debate will be the first chance either side has to break out a turning point in this campaign Andrea Mitchell NBC News

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this campaign Andrea Mitchell NBC News New York and today the presidential campaign there was an uproar over rats that had nothing to do with rodent control jailhouse snitches or the voter groups hanging around landfills this was about a flash of a message in a Republican ad and NBC's Claire Shipman has more tonight gore and Lieberman's motorcade making its way from one school to another in southern Ohio the candidates talking education but all the focus today on the meaning of one word rats shown in this Republican television commercial for one thirtieth of a second I find it a very disappointing development I've never seen anything quite like it the ad is about prescription drugs but if you slow it down read between the lines the word rats appears over the phrase Gore's prescription plan the Bush campaign says it's a meaningless flash silly even but explanations for how it got there are confused last night Alex Castellanos the veteran Republican admin who made the commercial says the reference is unintentional but today he suggests he put it there on purpose to emphasize the tail end of the word bureaucrats but he says he wasn't trying to call al gore a rat it doesn't matter it all it was was a drumbeat to get you to pay attention to the real

thing bureaucrats a marketing expert on the effects of so-called subliminal advertising says in his experience this sort of word flash is not accidental and it can be effective I think there's a curious selection of letters to take the last four letters and bureaucrats in saying Gore's health plan is being chaos being developed by rats plans where they contain contains a lot of emotions when you're talking about people's health in public the gore campaign is trying to stay away from the story but behind the scenes aides are pushing it relentlessly expressing shock passing out background materials on subliminal advertising as for the ad itself Republicans say it was

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for the ad itself Republicans say it was due to be pulled off the air today anyway Claire Shipman NBC News Cincinnati and as you might expect this controversy knocked the Bush campaign off its stride once again its plan message on Medicare reform it's been a tough couple of weeks for the Republicans in that regard NBC's David Gregory joins me now from st. Louis tonight David well Tom that's right Medicare not rats was on the issues calendar today but again Bush is knocked off his message and the timing couldn't be worse Bush today forced to answer a charge from Democrats not on policy but on pictures the flash of the word rats on the screen was a swipe at the vice president and meant to subtly sway voters conspiracy theories abound in American politics I don't think we need to be subliminal about the differences between our views on prescription drugs another distraction and campaign strategists say another day lost for a campaign trying to turn things around similar missteps last week and the debate over the debates consumed most of Bush's efforts to get his message out Monday Bush's use of an expletive to describe a reporter Thursday Bush retool his campaign style and slogan in response to Republican critics who charged the campaign had lost its way and today's flap over the ad just three days before the Olympics begin which campaign officials believe will divert attention away from politics until the first Monday in October leaving just 36 days before the election this phase of the campaign comes down to winning everyday you try to win it on the evening news you try to win it in the newspapers every morning and you can't afford to waste many days today Bush's spokeswoman blames this distraction on Democrats but would the American people be better served if the Democrats chose to focus on the issues as opposed to choosing to focus on on bizarre allegations like this yes I

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bizarre allegations like this yes I think they would be today which says all of this is just another example of Democrats making quote everything out of anything maybe so but somebody the problem for Bush is that it doesn't take much to throw him off his message or his game Tom thanks very much NBC's David Gregory tonight with the bush camping they have agreed to disagree and they're going to do it four times the bush and gore campaigns have cut a deal for a series of debates after weeks of arguments and counter-arguments and false starts it turns out both campaigns are going to accept after all the debates that were suggested by that Commission set up to do just that we get details tonight from NBC News correspondent David Gregory who was traveling with the bush campaign in Pomona California David good evening to you good evening to you Brian the question tonight why the turnaround well senior Bush advisors say the debate debate had become a huge distraction his campaign sorely in need of a boost it was time for Governor Bush to send a clear message that indeed he does want to go toe to toe with Al Gore meeting in Washington today officials from both campaigns agree to four debates to be sponsored by the presidential debate commission the first October 3rd at the University of Massachusetts in Boston the second October 5th a vice presidential face-off at Centre College in Danville Kentucky the third October 11th the presidential debate at Wake Forest University in North Carolina and the final session October 17th at Washington University in st. Louis each debate runs 90 minutes but still to be decided the format including sources say the staging and use of podiums that's paramount to governor Bush he's criticized past Commission debates as too restrictive too prone to one-liners the governor is very eager to debate he's looking forward to a a free-flowing substantive real and genuine discussion

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substantive real and genuine discussion of all the issues this is good because the American people want to hear from these people in formal settings tonight's breakthrough despite the still unsolved mystery of how secret debate preparation material including a videotape that shows governor Bush in a mock debate fell into the hands of a top aide to Al Gore the FBI is investigating tonight and Bush officials said late today they have no idea how or even if campaign security was breached right David Gregory with the Bush campaign in California tonight for us thank you the presidential debates between Vice President Gore and governor Bush the first will be traditional but for the second meeting the two will be seated and the third encounter will be Town Hall style now gore and Bush are both veteran debaters each had 10 during the primaries NBC's Jonathan alter took a look at some of those past performances george w bush i've got a record of accomplishment Geary Al Gore heard you're gonna shred the social safety net both candidates show they could mix it up during the primaries luckily the Chinese government will keep their agreements they haven't kept their agreements for 20 years that's why we let them in the WTO as part of agreement keeping as they prepare for their first debate on October 3rd in this hall in Boston the question now how useful will that experience be success in debates is partly about throwing the other candidate off his game plan in South Carolina bush caught John McCain by surprise go on let me say one thing about all this business John I told you I pulled them all down you didn't pull this as I did this that ended up in a man's windshield yesterday Al Gore scored big on Bill Bradley in Iowa with this let me introduce a friend of mine to you Chris Peterson is here could you stand up Chris chris is a farmer with 400 acres why did you vote against the the disaster relief for Chris Peterson both bush and gore showed

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Chris Peterson both bush and gore showed they could counter punch - you can disagree with me on issues John but do not question do not question my trustworthiness and do not compare me to Bill Clinton the difference is that's incredible plan devotes 2/3 of the money to people who already have health insurance a debate mistake by either candidate in a race this close could really hurt Gore's advantage going in is his record as a stronger debater Bush's advantages lower expectations but most viewers won't think about all the pre debate handicapping they'll watch listen and judge Jonathan alter NBC News New York now two American presidential politics and just as these Olympics are stealing the spotlight governor george w bush is hoping to kick-start his campaign by focusing more sharply on the middle class especially women in those crucial swing states where undecided voters will decide this election we have two reports tonight we'll begin with NBC's David Gregory on the road with the Bush campaign losing ground to the vice president today governor Bush again reaches the campaign's message the second course correction in as many weeks touring our maternity ward in Little Rock this morning Bush touts what he calls his Butte for the middle class my plan is one that gives people options not orders at every stop today taxes are issue one while Gore attacks the Republican nominee for favoring only the rich Bush says his across-the-board cut helps the middle class more than the vice president's targeted relief it's so targeted that it misses the target fifty million Americans get no tax relief aides concede recent credibility attacks on the vice president haven't worked creating more distractions than questions about Gore's character campaign sources now say Bush must focus on core issues education taxes health care Social Security areas where Bush

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care Social Security areas where Bush can attack Gore for favoring government solutions over individual choice and attempt to communicate directly to those undecided voters those folks makin twenty five to seventy five thousand dollars that haven't yet made up their mind seven weeks from Election Day the undecideds mean everything campaign strategists say it's not just working families but regaining the support of women that's critical especially in the biggest battleground states states like Missouri which is a dead heat Michigan and Pennsylvania where Gore is ahead and Ohio where Bush clings to a slight edge Wisconsin's a toss-up and a surprise is normally Republican leaning Florida where Bush has lost his large advantage and the race is very tight together these states have ninety eight electoral votes bush advisers now believe the battle should be over issues and they believe this is the time to strike just as undecided voters are looking for key differences between the candidates of the David Gregory NBC News should cause this is Lisa Myers in

Washington where Republicans say to understand the difficulties facing Bush you need only look to Pennsylvania not long ago Bush had a small lead here now this critical state is leaning Gore one reason independent voters like Melissa Kelly a lawyer who once favored Bush now undecided why she says Bush's choice of conservative Dick Cheney as his running mate and Bush's own uneven performance a lack of preparedness and a lack of quick thinking which i think is very important to the office her husband Carl Brad scre also leaning a little more toward Gore since he distanced himself from Bill Clinton but brodster says he has problems with Gore's populist rhetoric and his inconsistency he's pro-business occasionally then he's bashing business occasionally both are flattered by the attention lavished on their state bush has made 17 stops here including three days during his convention and plans three more stops

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convention and plans three more stops this week alone war has made 18 stops and also returns this week I've suggested it may be the candidate sort of applied for Pennsylvania driver's licenses what's more both campaigns already have spent five million dollars each in Pennsylvania and just popped down almost a million dollars more why because this crucial state has 23 electoral votes and is almost always close the popular governor Tom Ridge leads the fight for Bush it's a good message now we have to do a better job of he's got my job you campaign both camps say the battle here will turn on leadership health care and education nor says he's for school accountability but requires no real testing the gore plan begins with accountability the main battleground now the Philadelphia suburbs and women to succeed Bush must win some of them back Pennsylvania a must-win for both men who would be President tonight still in the hands of the undecideds Lisa Myers NBC News Washington six weeks and tonight Vice President Al Gore is trying to win favor with a controversial approach to those oil prices he wants to tap into America's emergency reserve that's touched off a heated debate within the administration we have two reports we'll begin with NBC's Claire Shipman hoping to tap into public outrage over high oil prices gore today pushes the president to make the controversial move of tapping into the nation's oil reserves I support oil releases from our national Strategic Petroleum Reserve Clinton is supposed to make a decision within days but Gore is only proposing a test sale of 5 million barrels a small percentage of the almost 600 million barrels the u.s. keeps on hand for emergencies many experts say it's a clear attempt to protect himself politically this oil issue could be an

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politically this oil issue could be an issue the cost Gore the election in some close bank and the Bush campaign immediately called it an election year ploy we have no comprehensive energy policy Gore may be looking for political cover but he's also hoping that his oil announcement will provide a change of subject from what has been his worst week in a month and a half simple point first a blow-up on the issue of health care questions about whether Gore misstated the costs of arthritis medication for both his mother-in-law and his dog it calls her a hundred and eight dollars per month it costs 37 dollars and 80 cents a month for a dog in fact it seems Gore did not take those numbers from personal experience but from a congressional report on drug prices the gore campaign says the general idea is right but citing privacy issues won't give the actual numbers well the the issue is not her the issue is what seniors around the country are paying why is this important he has had a tendency over the years to to take a pretty good story and try to make it a little better by embellishing adding sort of stretching it beyond where the facts would take it and then questions about this now I still remember the lullabies that I heard as a child look for the union labor but that union song was written in the 1970s when Gore was in his mid 20s Gore says he was obviously joking the porters are also grumbling that has been hard to get answers from Gore he hasn't held a full scale news conference in two months Gore aides admit it's been a choppy week but they hope today's announcement on oil reserves including a proposal to release four hundred million dollars to help poor families pay home heating bills this winter is what the public will really pay attention to Claire Shipman NBC News Washington there's now 45 days until the presidential election

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45 days until the presidential election and crunch time for the campaign's especially in swing states like Florida where undecided voters are getting special attention NBC's Campbell Brown is traveling with the Bush campaign predicting victory in Florida today in Orlando an upbeat governor Bush shares his vision with an enthusiastic Republican crowd our government must trust individuals to plan for their own life that's a stark contrast to my opponent the country's fourth largest state with its 25 electoral votes Florida is one of the biggest prizes of the election in just two and a half months ago it was firmly in the bush column now it's a statistical dead heat since the Democratic convention vice president Gore's popularity has surged and he's launched an aggressive campaign effort here helped by Florida's booming economy gore is targeting the growing number of young working families interested in education in health care his running mate Senator Joe Lieberman who campaigned here just yesterday has energized Florida's large Jewish population to regain momentum and what some analysts say is a must-win State for him Bush has increased spending on TV advertising ads the question Gore's credibility and highlight Bush's policies on education and prescription drug benefits Bush's plan seniors choose and on this two-day campaign swing he is focusing on the state's most crucial constituencies appealing to South Florida's Cuban population and emphasizing Medicare reform at this retirement Center the elderly make up about 18 percent of Florida's population and 30% of those expected to vote but one political analyst says the extra effort Bush is putting in here could cost him in other swing states Gore by making bush campaign in Florida has won a huge strategic victory in this campaign with voter turnout a key factor both sides are launching major

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are launching major get-out-the-vote drives here Bush advisors say Florida will be a mainstay on his schedule the gore campaign says either the vice president or his running mate will be here every week from now until Election Day Campbell Brown NBC News Orlando Florida NBC's Claire Shipman with the gore campaign in Washington DC tonight David Gregory is with George W Bush in Wisconsin Claire let's begin with you Tom Gore's team believes that the booming economy is his greatest strength heading into the debates and not just how healthy it is right now but how it could easily go bust according to Gore in the wrong hands mistakes according to gore couldn't be higher forty days from now prosperity itself will be on the ballot today in Washington he vows to protect economic growth and the interests of the middle class by keeping the budget balanced and paying down the debt but the key gore advisers believe to using the economy effectively is to make voters worry about george w bush's economic policy what I can't support is a 1.6 trillion dollar tax cut that mostly helps the very wealthy which comes at the expense of middle-class families and could wreck our good economy in the process that fear of messing things up is very important to Al Gore and when Gore can get people to focus on the economy he does well in fact in the latest NBC poll 42 percent of registered voters thought Gore would do a better job with the economy 36 percent favored george w bush still Gore advisors admits since the race is dead even the issue hasn't helped that much but look for him to keep pounding away at it because his advisors believe in the final weeks the economy will make a difference Tom thanks very much NBC's clerkship and tonight of course governor George Bush has a completely different take on what today's good economic news represents and NBC's David Gregory is traveling with the Bush campaign as I

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traveling with the Bush campaign as I said in Wisconsin David what do you have for us well Tom Bush is hardly shying away from a fight over the economy but his senior advisors admit the campaign's biggest obstacle is facing an opponent who can point to prosperity on watch so from the Texas governor today a scare tactic of his own the Texas governor today in Green Bay Wisconsin brands the vice president an old-style tax and spender who would direct the biggest federal spending hike in 35 years a vast departure Bush says from the centrist New Democrat philosophy that swept the vice-president and Bill Clinton into office eight years ago if the vice president gets elected to bake the era of big government being over is over and so to that Fair could be our prosperity Bush who even talks about the budget during a practice session with the Green Bay Packers and guess what he just asked can we get the tax bracket lower charges Gore's plan for bigger government and more spending will lead to deficits and tax hikes and yet it's Bush who's been forced

to defend his 1.3 trillion dollar tax cut against the charge that it will bust the budget beyond the charges and the counter charges still this question will the strategy work can Bush convince voters that the economy while strong now is still vulnerable yes his advisors say just look at the debt even polls the public is indeed interested in a change in leadership Don thanks very much NBC's David Gregory tonight and in the presidential race which is effectively a dead heat at the moment the high price of oil is becoming a major issue today the two candidates stake out starkly different positions on what's the best approach just days before their first debate Tuesday in Boston NBC's David Gregory is with the Bush campaign Claire Shipman with gore David today the governor was in an attack mode he certainly was Tom it's clear that Bush sees the politics of oil prices cutting his way now again

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of oil prices cutting his way now again today he uses the issue as a club against the vice president saying the clinton-gore administration's record of neglect could have dire consequences in the highly competitive battleground state of Michigan where Bush says rising home heating oil prices are a growing hardship the Texas governor warns that what he calls the current energy shock could lead to recession oil consumption is increasing our production is dropping our imports of foreign oil are skyrocketing and this administration has failed act moisture Nate pledges more than seven billion dollars to reduce the country's dependence on foreign oil which includes opening 1.5 million acres of Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling promising money to explore alternative energy sources and bolstering low-income energy assistance programs and bush attacks as short-sighted the administration's release of 30 million barrels from the strategic reserves at best we merely swap slightly lower prices before the election for higher prices after November the 7th while remaining on the campaign trail today back in Washington Bush is chastised by conservative Republicans we're skipping the opening of the Christian coalition's national gathering an opportunity to shore up his base if you want people to fall on your sword for you and and work the precincts to do everything these people have got to do you it helps for the general to say I need you in this battle on it despite that tonight senior Bush advisors are still confident that Christian conservatives are squarely behind the Texas governor who is by the way in Texas tonight for debate preparation all weekend long ahead of Tuesday's first debate if first face-off between gore and bush and tonight advisers are still spending pretty low expectations for the texas governor saying after all al gore is the best debater in modern American politics Tom thanks very much NBC's David Gregory tonight in Washington Al Gore's argument

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tonight in Washington Al Gore's argument on the energy issue centers are on one of his favorite topics protecting the environment NBC's Claire Shipman also in Washington tonight has more on the gore opposition Claire Tom Al Gore rearranged his schedule for today so that he could take on the Texas Governor on oil and the environment issues the gore team believes should be winners for the vice president at the Audubon Society in Maryland today Gore calls Bush's energy plan outdated and devastating to the environment the other side now proposes to misuse high oil prices as an excuse to let oil companies invade precious national treasures like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge meanwhile his running mate heads to Texas it's the governor on heavy pollution in Houston does governor Bush now want to do for America's environment what he's done here in Texas I hope not Gore actually doesn't talk about the environment much mainly because polls show him the clear favorite on the issue you show me a voter that puts a premium on the environment and I'll show you a voter that's already plenty of vote for Al Gore but voters are evenly divided on who has the best energy policy last week Gore's push to open the strategic oil reserve to bring down gas prices was labeled political so today he's eager to emphasize other proposals for curbing US dependence on oil for example tax breaks to purchase fuel-efficient vehicles and home heating equipment tomorrow the focus shifts to debates Gore heads to Sarasota Florida to prepare for Tuesday's session bringing along a handful of citizens Gore has met on the campaign trail to help him get ready Gore only started preparing an Ernest for the debates earlier this month and we're told that this weekend won't be overly taxing his team is well aware that a big danger for the studious gore can be looking over rehearsed Tom thank you Claire Shipman in Washington tonight politics now and word that the FBI is

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politics now and word that the FBI is open to full criminal investigation into who sent debate briefing materials from the Bush campaign to the gore campaign no word yet on how soon an arrest will come as for the candidates today governor Bush addressed a Christian Coalition conference by satellite from his ran the group's founder had warned against Republicans taking the conservative vote for gratis vice president Gore's only public appearance today was a brief one posing with some voters who were helping him prepare for Tuesday's debate now one of the areas where gore and Bush disagree is tax relief a critical issue for many voters here's NBC's Jonathan alter Matt and Heather Hoyer of Parma Ohio two incomes two children and two busy until now to study the tax plans offered by the presidential candidates there with combined incomes near the national median of 53 thousand a year for a family of four the Warriors do want to know about tax relief that tax cuts very important because more money you know and my pocket for my family is very important to me I like the seem more maybe more tax money going towards education for the kids that reflects the debate now taking place between George W Bush and Al Gore over how to use the federal budget surplus I am proposing here today and announcing today a plan of targeted tax cuts for middle income families it's so targeted that it misses the target 50 million Americans get no tax relief their budget plan spends more on a tax cut for the wealthiest 1% of taxpayers then their budget invests in health care prescription drugs education and national defense all combined we're gonna have tax relief let's be fair and everybody who pays taxes I want to get relief because I believe once priorities are met I would rather you spend your

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are met I would rather you spend your own money than the federal government spending on your behalf Bush's proposed tax plan tolls 1.6 trillion dollars over ten years more than three times the size of wars the bush plan would cut federal income tax rates for all income levels double the child credit to $1,000 per child exempt the lowest income Americans from paying any federal income tax at all allow those who don't itemize their tax returns to deduct for charity and eliminate the inheritance tax altogether bottom line Bush believes it's only logical that those who pay the most in taxes should get the most relief Gore believes that more modest tax breaks should be focused on the middle class with much of the money leftover used to pay down the national debt Gore would offer less immediate tax relief than instead grand incentives for tax free savings Gore's plan would establish new retirement savings accounts to help middle-class families build six-figure nest eggs tax free establish 401 Jay lifetime learning accounts to help the poor and middle class pay for college or mid-career training allow up to a ten thousand dollar deduction for college tuition expand tax credits for child care and stay-at-home parents and exempt up to five million dollars from inheritance taxes tax analyst Ken Keyes says the two points differ sharply over whether education should be specifically encouraged by the tax code more left up to families to decide for themselves the gore plan has some targeted incentives that do provide incentives to put money away for college on the other hand the bush plan provides a much bigger tax cut for families generally in middle-class homes across America families like the horrors will have a chance Tuesday to judge which tax philosophy the suits their own Jonathan alter NBC

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